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25 YEAR RE-REVIEW

Negro Comedian Gets Star Adventure Role

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NEW YORK (AP)—Bill Cosby, one of the brightest of the new comedians, has been signed to co-star in an action-adventure series, "I Spy," aimed at NBC's schedule next fall.

The show will be produced by Sheldon Leonard, the man behind a string of successful series that have spun off CBS' old "Danny Thomas Show." Exteriors will be shot on location in Hong Kong. Most important, it will be the first time a Negro has had a lead role in a dramatic series.

Cosby, a studious-looking, gentle-mannered fellow who reserves his comedy routines for professional appearances, feels that his assignment is important.

"Not as a racial issue," he explained. "It's a personal quest. Can I do the job? Can this comedian turn into an actor?"

Robert Culp will play an agent disguised as a tennis bum. Cosby will be his colleague, disguised as his trainer.

Cosby thinks the casting of a Negro in an important role is simple evolution — "it had to come, a time when the fact that the character was dark-skinned

had no importance to the story line."

Still in his 20s, Cosby was a star athlete at Temple University. He was "discovered" on NBC's "Tonight Show," about 18 months ago and since has turned up on most of the television variety programs, scoring on most. He keeps away from what he calls "racial humor."

"I can only do what seems funny to me, and it isn't that," he said. "I think that perhaps the only real wheeler-dealer in bitter racial humor now is Dick Gregory, and that's because he is overwhelmingly concerned with it."

"But on the other hand, I think we've gotten away from the stereotype very well. You don't see the Negro maid and butler much any more. There are even some prison shows made nowadays that don't have a Negro — singing — on death row. Yes, it's time we had a casting situation like 'I Spy.'"

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